
Transition Task Force for VSDBM-H

Regional Day Program

Recommendations

June 5, 2007

Submitted To:

Dr. Billy K. Cannaday, Jr.

**Superintendent of Public Instruction
Virginia Department of Education**

VSDBM-H Transition Task Force

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Introduction

In March 2007, the Superintendent of Public Instruction, Dr. Billy K. Cannaday, Jr., appointed a Task Force of individuals to create a set of recommendations that would guide the Virginia Department of Education's (VDOE) planning for and subsequent implementation of the transition of the VSDBM-H program at Hampton to a Regional Day program by June 2008. The members represented a broad array of constituents (parents, educators, school superintendents and special education directors) who had a stake in the success of the transition. In addition, a member of the VSDB Advisory Commission served on the Task Force. A list of the Task Force members is included as attachment # 3.

Dr. Cannaday directed the members, "to keep their eyes on the children who need to receive services." In addition, he observed that the Task Force members should consider the needs of parents and local school divisions as they formulated their recommendations, noting that neither group should be disadvantaged by the process or the resulting programmatic configuration. To these ends, the Task Force's recommendations are grounded in the following guiding principles:

1. Students and their families must continue to receive a free and appropriate education according to prevailing legal policies and practices afforded to all students in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

2. Families and students currently enrolled at the Hampton school and local school personnel should be made continuously aware of the transition planning and the resulting recommended processes and programs to be implemented during the transition process prior to and after June 2008.
3. Throughout the planning process and transition the VDOE should work closely with school administrators, parents, and existing Hampton school staff to ensure a seamless transition.
4. As the transition takes place and is fully implemented parents and schools should not be unduly burdened. They should not encounter additional costs as a result of the transition as these costs should be the responsibility of the Commonwealth. In particular, all costs necessary for the improvement of the facility to enable the creation of the proposed Regional Day program and the addition of 'other educational programs' should be the responsibility of the Commonwealth.

Recommendations

1. **The VSDBM-H at Hampton will become a Regional Day program after June 2008. It is the recommendation of this Task Force that all placement decisions concerning all students currently enrolled at the VSDBM-H at Hampton be made using the prevailing local, state, and Federal policies and practices afforded to all students with disabilities in Virginia. The actions should take place as early as possible in the 2007-2008 academic year to enable a seamless transition to a new placement.**

- 2. The Task Force recommends that the programs provided to students and families be affiliated with community service agencies that are multi-faceted in the resources they can provide. In addition to transition support services, agencies should offer links/referrals for support services in areas such as mental health, in-home support, and respite care.**

- a. Background

By June 2008, all students who are currently enrolled at the VSDBM-H at Hampton, their families and/or guardians will have reconsidered their enrollment status at the school. Some will have graduated while others will continue to be eligible for special education and related services. Some will prefer to attend the consolidated residential program at Staunton while others will prefer to receive their services at the new Regional Day program, their home school division, or some other approved program.

As the decision-making process emerges during and subsequent to the planning process, those involved should consider the parent expectations obtained through personal interviews conducted with parents of current students in the spring of 2007 by the Task Force facilitator and reviewed by all Task Force members. The parent thoughts and ideas are found in attachment # 1. Further, the decision-makers should take into consideration the 'Essential Program Elements' for programs serving students with sensory impairments developed by the Task Force and reported in attachment #2.

- 3. The Task Force recommends the creation of a Regional Day program for students with sensory impairments whose needs cannot best be met in a school-**

based program and the members' strong preference is that the Regional Day program shall be located at the current Hampton VSDBM-H facility but only if sufficient funds are available to make necessary improvements to that facility's infrastructure (buildings, grounds, and support services) *prior to the actual transition* given the needs of the students who will be served at the Regional Day program after June 2008. The new Regional Day program should be formulated so that the historical significance of the current school shall be kept intact.

a. Background

The enabling legislation for the consolidation of the two schools says in Part 2: "The Department of Education shall assist with the coordination with appropriate local entities for the transition of services to a Regional Day program in the Hampton Roads area by no later than June 30, 2008." It is likely that many of the students who are currently enrolled at the school who do not graduate by June 2008 will continue to receive services at the Regional Day program. Some families may decide to have their child served in their home school after reviewing existing service capacity in that school system. In addition, it is reasonable to expect that other students with sensory impairments who reside in Region II will be served at the new program only if a more restrictive placement is required due to lack of progress.

The VDOE planners should keep in mind the input obtained from parents through the facilitator's interviews with parents of students who are currently enrolled and summarized in attachment # 1 and reported in the Task Force's Parent Interview report submitted to the VDOE. Further, when formulating the expected

programmatic characteristics of the Day program the VDOE planners should consider the ‘Essential Program’ characteristics found in attachment # 2. The programs should be well-rounded including educational, life skills and post-school employment experiences and should, as appropriate, be affiliated with community-based programs as noted in recommendation 2. Members thought the planners should consider having the school be an extended-day or extended-school-year program to enable these diverse programs. Regardless of where the program is housed, facilities need to be state-of-the-art and programs delivered by highly qualified personnel. The members believed that staff members at the current school should be continued in the new programs.

Members believed strongly that there should be a ‘critical mass’ of students that would be served in the new specific programs to make them cost-efficient. Members agreed that the student-teacher ratios currently used as standards in Virginia should be applied to the new Day program. Additionally, members indicated that to the extent possible and appropriate, the students with sensory impairments served in the Day program should have opportunities to learn with students who do not have disabilities. Finally, members observed that while programs in the Day school ought to be ethnically and gender diverse, specific programs should be age and disability specific.

Last, because the new Day program may involve a number of changes both at the current facility – staff, buildings and grounds, support services – and school divisions, the planners might want to consider phasing in the new programs at the

Day school. This would reduce the burden for parents, Day program and school division staff and administrators.

- 4. We recommend that the VDOE planners work closely with the school divisions in Region II that are likely to use the regional program as an option for providing services to their students with sensory impairments who cannot be served in a school-based program to gain a better understanding of potential needs to be addressed at the school and an understanding of additional support school personnel and families would need to make the regional program a viable option.**
- 5. We recommend that the VDOE planners develop a request for proposal (RFP) to be sent to all potential entities that might be interested in designing, implementing, and administering the new Day program.**

- a. Background

The new Regional Day program will not be a state operated program. The Task Force is cognizant that the Commonwealth has established policies and procedures for setting up regional programs. Further, the Task Force members are aware of the fact that there are a number of existing regional programs that should be considered as viable candidates for administering the new program. Indeed, it may be desirable to form new strategic alliances between two or more school divisions to create the new program. As noted above, the Department's role *is to assist with the coordination with appropriate local entities for the transition of services to a Regional Day program in the Hampton Roads area.* To this end, the

school divisions in Region II should have a strong role in the final decision as to what entity will deliver and administer the new Day programs.

We recommend that the VDOE planners send the RFP to all *well established* potential entities that might be interested in designing, implementing, and administering the new Day program. School divisions should be contacted to help the VDOE determine the entities that will receive the RFP. In considering potential entities for administering the regional program, the Task Force believes the VDOE planners should work closely with affected school divisions. Further, as planners consider the entity to administer the new facility they should weigh the history the entity has with respect to past partnerships with affected school divisions and its proven history of working effectively with students with sensory impairments and their families.

This RFP could seek the respondents' concepts for the regional program considering the essential elements that the Task Force set forth in attachment 2. The Task Force recommends that the VDOE planners engage members of the Task Force to help develop the RFP, the criteria for reviewing the RFP responses, and participate in the review process.

Finally, as the VDOE planners enter into this process it will be important to first identify the appropriate services (desirable levels and types of services to be provided in the new Day program) in close consultation with school division representatives. Once the ideal framework (programmatic and administrative) is discerned, the planners will have to ask the hard question, "What will it take to get to the ideal?"

- 6. Task Force members want to stay involved as the VDOE planning for transition to a Regional Day program evolves and support the VDOE suggestion that the current Task Force nominate members to serve as members of the planning team. To that end, Ralph Shelman and David Young were nominated to join the planning team by the Task Force at its May 14, 2007, meeting. They accepted the nomination.**
- 7. The Task Force is fully supportive of the placement of additional programs on the Hampton campus and recommends that the VDOE include consideration of such programs in the planning phase of the process.**

- a. Background

The second task with which the Task Force was charged focused on other educational programs that might be located at the Hampton VSDBM-H campus in addition to the Regional Day program. These programs would be defined by school divisions and enable them to meet and extend their current missions. These might be existing programs that could be relocated to the school or they could be new programs that the school divisions had been planning but could not implement because of space constraints. Programs might be associated with one or more school divisions. Again, these would not be state operated programs but would be administered by a local school division or some regional configuration. Members noted that in addition to existing local, state, Federal funding streams being used to support current programming there are others that should be considered by the planners including the Carl Perkins Act.

Throughout the Task Force members' deliberation on the issue of potential programs to be located at the School the members depended on the school division representatives as key informants to this aspect of their work. Suggested programs are listed below to provide the planners with some idea of what school representatives are considering with respect to this task. The planning group will certainly work closely with school division personnel and representatives of the Day program as this recommendation comes to fruition. As the planning moves forward the planners should consult with other community-based public, not-for-profit, and private sector entities that might want to become involved in the new facility. One viable program is the Peninsula ARC.

As the planning group contemplates specific programs the members recommend that, to the extent possible, these programs complement those contained in the Day program. For example, they might provide opportunity for Day program students to be mainstreamed or to have work or community skill building experiences. Further, the facility will need to have an infrastructure (physical plant, grounds, and support services) to enable the successful implementation of the programs. This will, as with other recommendations, require planners to conduct a gap analysis or answer the question – “If we want to implement these new programs, what will it take to do it?” No new programs should be instituted until appropriate modifications are made to the facility to enable efficient and effective transition to the new site.

Many of the programs discussed by Task Force members for possible inclusion at the Hampton facility were vocationally oriented to promote the

transition of students at the Day school to the world of work. Members noted that school divisions in the region also could use such services/programs. The Special Education Directors on the Task Force, after meeting with other Special Education Directors in Region II, suggested the following alternate uses for the VSDBM-H at Hampton:

- Regional Alternative Program for Suspended/Expelled students (similar to Enterprise Academy in NNPS) that would include general education students and those with disabilities.
- Regional Alternative Program (similar to Point Option in NNPS) for high functioning students who cannot adjust to the size and structure of a typical high school.
- Regional Professional Development Center perhaps staffed by each school division to tap the best and brightest from each school division. While all divisions have unique professional development needs, the majority of the topics they need to address with their staffs are similar. This would include a training facility where large numbers of teachers/ administrators can be developed, where the State could hold regional meetings, and that could be used by T-TAC for regional training sessions.
- A comprehensive regional program that would address the varied pre-vocational and vocational development and job placement needs of students with disabilities.

8. The members recommend that as the planning ensues the Commonwealth clearly delineate its role and responsibility (policy, programmatic, and financial)

for the transition and continuing programming at the new Day program and with additional programs to be created at the facility.

a. Background

As noted throughout this document the members were concerned that the Commonwealth should not abandon its role and responsibility to the new school. Members noted that while the new programs will not be state operated programs, the Commonwealth will continue to have a role in their design, conduct, and monitoring as well as a role in providing financial support for the facility improvements that will be necessary to enable the transition and new programs to be a success. This is not to say that the Commonwealth has given any indication that it was abandoning its responsibilities but rather to say the members believed there was a need to make the Commonwealth's role and responsibility explicit.

Attachment 1

Parent needs after June 2008

- Transportation
- In-home after school support, particularly if residential now
- Information and training on how to help at home
- During summer, Day programs

Parent Communication Expectations

- What's the program going to look like?
- What are the school building and grounds going to look like?
- Who are the faculty members and will they be able to work with my child?
- Who are the students and will they be like my child?

Desirable Aspects of Transition *Prior to June 2008*

- Begin working now with parents and students RE transition
 - We are all nervous; our children don't deal well with change
- Set up visitations to Staunton
- Keep us informed continuously, before decisions are made
 - In writing, by phone, and by e-mail
- Have some open houses for parent-teacher interaction
- Make sure we know all our options
- Bring Staunton staff here to get to know our children

Attachment 2

Key Regional Program Elements¹

Personnel

- Highly qualified
- Caring and dedicated
- Structured, ongoing, systematic professional development

Student Services

- Academics
- Transition
- Life skills
- Appropriate instructional materials/technologies
- Socialization programs—sports, socialization, transportation, on and off campus, off-campus activities
- Related services—OT/PT/Speech, therapeutic, OM, physical, medical
- Vocational component, including Community-based Instruction (CBI)
- Connection to general education on and off campus
- After school and weekend programs

Infrastructure

- Updated or rehabilitated infrastructure—buildings and grounds to support program with a timetable for these actions and a clear indication of State support

Family and Community

- Resource center for parents and community with reference materials, adaptive, equipment, accessibility, workshops
- Community service agency presence (community partnerships) to facilitate transition to the world of work and to provide ongoing services and resources to parents in the areas of mental health, in-home support, and respite care.

¹ In coordination with those programs currently available in local school divisions.

Attachment 3

VSDBM-H Day Regional Program Task Force 2007

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